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## **John E. Fetzer and Freemasonry**

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Sometime in 1933 or shortly before, John Fetzer became a Freemason, joining Kalamazoo's Anchor Lodge in Strict Observance (S. O.) No. 87 of the Free and Accepted Masons.<sup>1</sup> He remained a member in good standing of this lodge for the rest of his life.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps prompted by his half-brother Homer, who was a life-long and very active Mason,<sup>3</sup> Fetzer probably joined the lodge in part for the contacts he would make there which would help him break into Kalamazoo's social, political, and business elites. Membership in a lodge also conferred some advantage in his dealings in Washington DC where many of the powerbrokers were Masons: in at least one instance, an FCC commissioner, Governor Norman S. Case, indicated his support for Fetzer during a hearing on the 590 case by flashing him a Masonic sign.<sup>4</sup> However this may have been, Fetzer found much more in Freemasonry than simple fellowship and commercial and political advantage. Among other things, Freemasonry provided him with a set of teachings and symbolism that resonated

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<sup>1</sup> This and the following seven paragraphs are adapted from Brian C. Wilson, *John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2018), pp. 58-65.

<sup>2</sup> BR 12 (Broadcasting 1974 January-June): "Anchor Lodge lifetime membership" (R02.16901).

<sup>3</sup> FP 3 (Correspondence 1944): "Homer Fetzer to John E. Fetzer" (March 25, 1944) (R02.13835). After Homer died in Florida on January 14, 1970, Fetzer went to considerable effort to find out which lodge he had attended in Minneapolis in order to create a memorial for him: FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "John E. Fetzer to R. E. Dahl" (April 5, 1970) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "Glenn L. Alt to John E. Fetzer" (August 10, 1970) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "John E. Fetzer to Harvey E. Hansen" (August 13, 1970) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "H. R. Hansen to John E. Fetzer" (August 17, 1970) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "John E. Fetzer to R. E. Dahl" (August 19, 1970) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "George E. Mokler and R. E. Dahl to John E. Fetzer" (May 8, 1971) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "John E. Fetzer to R. E. Dahl" (April 5, 1971) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "R. E. Dahl to John E. Fetzer" (September 22, 1971) (R02.13873); FP 4 (Correspondence 1971): "John E. Fetzer to R. E. Dahl" (September 26, 1971) (R02.13873); BR 11 (Broadcasting 1970 January-April): "Masonic plaque inscription for Homer Fetzer" (R02.16869); TB 18 (Research Fetzer, Rhea—Diaries & Letters [Transcripts] [Restricted] 1968-1972) (January 16, 1970) (R02.14577).

<sup>4</sup> FP 2 (Correspondence 1937 II): "John E. Fetzer to Rhea Fetzer" (April 14, 1937) (R02.13820): "Sykes asked me a lot of questions and I feel that he would like to vote for me and probably will in the final analysis. Governor Case leaned over backwards in going into details ... he discussed the political side of the case. ... He is a Shriner and alluded to my being one and gave me the Masonic sign which I have reason to believe, means a vote."

with his developing worldview, as well as a set of rituals that filled a deep need in his life for spiritual practice.

### ***A Brief History of Freemasonry***

The history of Freemasonry is complex and its reputed origins in medieval guilds of itinerant (“free”) stonemasons are still hotly debated. However, in its modern form, Freemasonry sprang from a meeting in London of four existing lodges to form the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. In the wake of the formation of the Grand Lodge, new Masonic lodges spread throughout the British Isles and the European continent during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As one writer has described early Freemasonry, it was “largely a product of the Age of Enlightenment,” with “lodges commonly [meeting] in the upstairs rooms of pubs—accessible but private venues that enable men from different classes to meet ‘on the level’ for nonsectarian philosophical discussions supplemented by much food and ale.”<sup>5</sup> So popular did these meetings become that soon Freemasons were building separate buildings dedicated to the purpose. Such Masonic “temples” now became commonplace in many towns and cities. True to the spirit of the Enlightenment, any freeborn white male was eligible for membership, provided they were of good character, acknowledged monotheism and the brotherhood of man, and could find a sponsor among existing members. This meant that for the first time Protestants, Catholics, and Jews could meet on equal terms and engage in rational debate—although not on religion or politics, which were regarded as topics too contentious for gentlemen to engage in without rancor. As the Masonic “Anderson’s Constitutions” of 1738 put it, it was enough that a prospective initiate “adhere to that Religion in which all Men agree (leaving each Brother to his own particular Opinions) that is, to be Good Men and True, Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Names, Religions or Persuasions they may be distinguish’d.”<sup>6</sup>

In North America, Freemasonry enjoyed great popularity at the end of the colonial period, spreading throughout the thirteen original colonies and then into the hinterland shortly after the Revolutionary War.<sup>7</sup> For many, Masonic lodges provided a continuity of fellowship and a source of intellectual stimulation lacking on the frontier. It is not surprising, then, that we find lodges popping up in the Northwest Territory, the heart of what would become the Midwest, almost as soon as the earliest settlements were platted. Settlers from New England, Upstate New

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<sup>5</sup> Jay Kinney, *The Masonic Myth: Unlocking the Truth About Symbols, the Secret Rites, and the History of Freemasonry* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Piatigorsky, *Freemasonry: The Study of a Phenomenon* (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), pp. 102-104; Kinney, *The Masonic Myth* (2004), p. 36.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry in American Culture 1880-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), especially 3-71; Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

York, and Kentucky organized the first lodges in Ohio in the 1790s, and from there, Freemasonry quickly spread throughout the region.<sup>8</sup> The earliest Masonic lodge in Michigan dates from 1764, when a military lodge was warranted among British troops in Detroit, and by 1794, six more lodges could be found in the city. In 1826, there were enough new lodges in Michigan and Wisconsin to necessitate the creation of the Grand Lodge of Michigan, again in Detroit.<sup>9</sup> The number of lodges grew apace throughout the state during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (423 by 1899), and by 1900 even the smallest towns could boast a Masonic temple. By this time, Kalamazoo had two “blue lodges,” that is, lodges where the first three initiatory rituals are performed: Kalamazoo No. 22, chartered in 1849 and Anchor Lodge of S. O., chartered in 1857.<sup>10</sup> By 1922, Masonry was so popular in Michigan that Masons throughout the state contributed to the building of the neo-Gothic Detroit Masonic Temple, still the largest such temple in the world. The growth of Masonry in Michigan reflected trends in the nation at large: in 1930, over 3 million men were members, some 12 percent of the native white adult male population of the United States.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Fetzer and Freemasonry***

When John Fetzer joined Kalamazoo’s Anchor Lodge in the early 1930s, he was joining what was arguably the most successful fraternal order in the United States. Like millions of other American men, his reasons for joining were many. Fellowship and status within one’s community played a part, but so too did an attraction to American Freemasonry’s growing emphasis on civic service and philanthropy. Patriotism, too, was another strong motivation. A number of the nation’s Founding Fathers such as George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Paul Revere were Freemasons, and Masonic mythology had long claimed that Masons had played an outsized role in fomenting the Revolution and establishing the American Republic. Many Masons continued to believe that the craft would be instrumental in realizing the sacred destiny of the nation (such was the meaning of the purportedly Masonic symbol of the all-seeing eye above the unfinished pyramid on the back of the dollar bill).<sup>12</sup> The Masonic contention that the United States had been founded to perform a sacred mission to the rest of the world was one that Fetzer wholeheartedly embraced.

All of this undoubtedly had an appeal for John Fetzer, but the fact that he chose to join Anchor Lodge of S.O. No. 87 over Kalamazoo’s older Lodge No. 22 signals that his interest in Freemasonry went beyond simply fellowship, charity, and

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Freke Gould, *Gould’s History of Freemasonry Throughout the World*, Volume 6 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936), p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> Jefferson S. Conover, *Freemasonry in Michigan*, Volume 1 (Coldwater, MI: The Conover Printing and Engraving Co., 1897), pp. 14-173.

<sup>10</sup> *Transactions of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Michigan* (Port Huron, MI: Grand Lodge of Michigan, 1899), pp. 289-95.

<sup>11</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry in American Culture* (1984), p. 225; Kinney, *The Masonic Myth* (2004), p. 81.

<sup>12</sup> Kinney, *The Masonic Myth* (2004), pp. 59-70.

patriotism to something deeper. One of the reasons men in the thousands joined Masonic lodges in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was that many were seeking the spiritual experience that comes from meaningful ritual, something that America's ritual-poor Protestantism did not provide.<sup>13</sup> Thus Masonic rituals developed into highly formal and complex acts that required special rooms fitted out with specific symbols and elaborate props and costumes in order to be performed. There also developed during the period complex philosophical and religious interpretations of the rituals.<sup>14</sup> In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, there was a notable slackening in interest in the rituals to the point of perfunctoriness, and most lodges came to emphasize informal good fellowship, patriotism, and charity at the expense of ritual.<sup>15</sup> Not so the Strict Observance blue lodges. They continued the early emphasis on ritual performance, insisting on proper dress and behavior, formal atmosphere, ritual precision, and a fairly deep understanding of the meaning behind both the rituals and the symbols they employed.<sup>16</sup> The fact that all of this took more time and effort than required in other blue lodges meant that John Fetzer's choice of a Strict Observance lodge was not an idle one.

And what were the rituals and teachings that attracted Fetzer? As a blue lodge, Anchor Lodge provided Fetzer with the first three degrees of Masonry: Entered Apprentice (1°), Fellow Craft (2°), and Master Mason (3°). To achieve each of these degrees, which correspond to body, mind, and spirit respectively, the initiate is required to memorize the ritual, understand the symbols and vows used in the ritual, and then correctly perform the ritual in the presence of the masters of the lodge. Each of these rituals is performed in the lodge room, whose symbolism makes it a recreation of Solomon's Temple. Indeed, Solomon's Temple plays many roles in Masonry. Masonic mythology traces the origins of the order back to the ancient stonemasons who built that edifice, a fact reflected in the Order's logo, a crossed square and compass with the letter G for geometry in the center. Even if one does not take this mythology literally, however, Solomon's Temple remains important due to its multiple levels of symbolic association: for some, it is a microcosm mirroring the macrocosm, but for others it symbolizes the human mind.

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<sup>13</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry in American Culture* (1984), p. 42; see also Carnes, Mark C. *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>14</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry in American Culture* (1984), pp. 71, 42-71.

<sup>15</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry in American Culture* (1984), p. 225.

<sup>16</sup> "The term 'Strict Observance' was originally tied to a pseudo-masonic rite that included a number of extra degrees besides the primary three (Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason) that held some interest for freemasons in the 1700s. It died out in the late 1700s when the man who created the rite could not support any historical provenance for it. However, the use of 'Strict Observance' in the name of Michigan freemasonic lodges is more aligned with the idea of strictly observing the traditional Masonic constitutions and ritual from its origins (which is still a topic of debate). It denotes an implied intention of the freemasons who chose the name for their lodge to adhere to older, more strict ritual, conduct, and Masonic principles. In other words, the brothers were going to make sure discipline and attention to detail were practiced to make sure things were done right in the lodge ceremonies and in the behavior of members according to Masonic principles. No shortcuts or mistakes" (personal communication from Dirk W. Hughes, Director, Michigan Masonic Museum and Library, Grand Rapids, Michigan [November 10, 2015]).

For, just as the innermost chamber of Solomon's Temple—the Holy of Holies—was the meeting point between man and God, so too the innermost recess of the human psyche can play this role, if properly purified through ethical conduct consisting of the Masonic virtues of “faith, hope, and charity; brotherly love, relief, and truth; temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice.”<sup>17</sup> As Fetzer went through the three rituals, the presence of Old Testament motifs and the emphasis on traditional virtues must have appealed to his abiding Christian pietism, while the emphasis on the connection between macrocosm and microcosm, along with its psychological interpretations, fit well with the spiritual monism he was imbibing in Spiritualism and other esoteric sources.

What's more, the blue lodge rituals highlighted another virtue that also appealed to Fetzer: secrecy. In the third degree, the initiate plays the role of Hiram Abiff, the legendary master mason who built Solomon's Temple and who allowed himself to be murdered rather than reveal to the unworthy the password to Masonic secrets. For his faithfulness unto death, Hiram was rewarded by being raised from his grave, signaling to the initiate not only that he has progressed to a new level on his spiritual quest, but also the importance of secrecy to the successful pursuit of that quest.<sup>18</sup> This was a teaching that Fetzer took to heart. In later years he told confidants that he kept his spiritual interests a secret so as not to jeopardize his business interests, but it is hard to ignore the contribution of this core Masonic teaching to Fetzer's reticence about his spiritual path. Only once did he comment in print about his commitment to Freemasonry and then only obliquely: in his ruminations at the end of *One Man's Family* (1964), he said that his philosophy of life is based on “that which is *deeply* and *subtly* hidden in the *wisdom philosophy* enunciated in the distant past,” and that his readers “may require the prolific use of the square and compass in order to comprehend its geometric proportions.”<sup>19</sup>

John Fetzer achieved the status of Master Mason on November 13, 1933. He must have found the experience worthwhile, since he quickly went on the higher degrees. European Freemasons had devised a whole host of additional degrees beyond the third, which in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were gathered together into two “appendant” orders, the York and Scottish Rites.<sup>20</sup> Fetzer avidly participated in both. In the York Rite, Fetzer rapidly rose through the lower degrees of the Kalamazoo Royal Arch Masons (Chapter No. 13): Master Mark Mason (October 8, 1935), Most Excellent Master (October 29, 1935), Royal Arch Mason (February 25, 1936). He was then created a Knights Templar by the Peninsula Commandery No. 8 on April 8, 1936 (his Knights Templar hat and cloak are still preserved in the Fetzer archives). Once the York Rite was completed, he made even faster progress in the Scottish Rite, which was headquartered in Grand Rapids:

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<sup>17</sup> Kinney, *The Masonic Myth* (2004), pp. 107-19.

<sup>18</sup> Kinney, *The Masonic Myth* (2004), pp. 120-23.

<sup>19</sup> John E. Fetzer, *One Man's Family* (1964), pp. 196-97 (*italics in original*). He would, however, occasionally talk to trusted confidants about Masonry (“JEF—Jim Gordon—Arthur Douet—Austin, Texas” [February 1984] [JGC]; Charles E. Spence Oral History [January 10, 1997], pp. 99).

<sup>20</sup> Kinney, *The Masonic Myth* (2004), pp. 94-101.

initiated on October 20, 1936, he achieved the 32° two days later. Fetzner would then go on to join the Grand Rapids Saladin Lodge of the Shriners later that year. Despite his rapid progress, Fetzner would remain loyal to all the Masonic bodies that he joined, achieving life member status in each during the 1960s. This culminated in his elevation to the rank of Sovereign Grand Commander 33° and Honorary Member of the Grand Council of the Scottish Rite in Boston on September 24, 1969. To the end of his life, Fetzner would wear a gold Masonic ring with pride.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Fetzner and Esoteric Freemasonry***

Did John Fetzner's participation in Freemasonry expose him to esoteric currents that would influence the creation of his later "New Age" worldview? His lone remark in *One Man's Family* (1964) quoted above seems to raise the possibility. However, before attempting to answer this question, it is probably wise to define what "esotericism" means in the context of "esoteric Freemasonry." "Esoteric" *per se* simply means that which is hidden and not generally available to the public, as opposed to what is "exoteric" and open to the public. In the ancient world, systems of esoteric knowledge were commonly associated with the mystery religions, such as the cult of Isis or the Dionysian or Eleusinian mysteries. In order to access the esoteric knowledge they offered, one was obliged to go through a series of initiation rituals and swear never to reveal what one learned during the process. In most cases, the obligation to secrecy held remarkably well, such that we know very little about what was taught in most of the mystery religions. However, there is a body of esoteric knowledge that did survive more or less intact, that of the Hermetic mysteries.

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<sup>21</sup> FP 2 (Correspondence 1935 IV): "Rhea Fetzner to John E. Fetzner" (November 22, 1935) (R02.13816); FP 2 (Correspondence 1935 IV): "John E. Fetzner to Rhea Fetzner" (November 23, 1935) (R02.13816); FP 6 (Fetzner, Leland and Myrtle Correspondence 1964-1973): "Leeland Fetzner to John E. Fetzner" (October 25, 1969) (R02.13914); FP 9 (Fetzner Jewelry Appraisal, 1978-1987): "Paul E. Morrison Jewelry Appraisal" (August 17, 1978) (R02.13956); BR 10 (Broadcasting 1966 June-December): "Royal Arch Masons Certificate" (original) (R02.16837); BR 10 (Broadcasting 1968 September-December): "Masonic's 33<sup>rd</sup> Degree Awarded," *Kalamazoo Gazette* (Wednesday, October 2, 1968), p. 13" (R02.16846); BR 10 (Broadcasting 1969 June-September): "W. Wallace Kent to John E. Fetzner [includes press release]" (June 24, 1969) (R02.16850); BR 10 (Broadcasting 1969 June-September): "Supreme Council 33° Meeting in Boston," *The Scottish Rite News* (September-October 1969), p. 5 (R02.16850); BR 11 (Broadcasting 1969 September-December): "Annual Meeting of the Supreme Council, 33° Program" (September 17-25, 1969) (R02.16851) (also in this file are several letters of congratulation for achieving the 33°: Garry Brown (September 25, 1969); Paul Harvey (September 26, 1969); Sol Taishoff (September 26, 1969); Richard W. Chapin (September 27, 1969); BR 12 (Broadcasting 1971): "Charles Lawyer to John E. Fetzner" (January 28, 1971) (R02.16877); BR 12 (Broadcasting 1971): "Masonic 'birthday' card" (undated) (R02.16877); BR 12 (Broadcasting 1973 June-August): "The Kalamazoo Masonic Organizations Certificate of Appreciation" (June 19, 1973) (R02.16891); BR 14 (Broadcasting 1981 January-February): "Carl C. Worfel to John E. Fetzner" (January 19, 1981) (R02.16934); TB 6 (Research Material Broadcasting History [42-83] 1968 II): "Scottish Rite Record" (November 7, 1968) (R02.14343); TB 18 (Research Fetzner, Rhea—Diaries & Letters [Transcripts] [Restricted] 1968-1972) (September 24, 1969) (R02.14577); TB 18 (Research Fetzner, Rhea—Diaries & Letters [Transcripts] [Restricted] 1968-1972) (September 24, 26, 1973) (R02.14578); Linda Grdina Oral History (June 27, 1996), p. 20; Whitson Oral History (March 30, 2011), pp. 14-15; (April 7, 2011), p. 40.

Named after Hermes Trismegistus (“Thrice Great”), a mythical sage who was said by some to be the first wisdom teacher in the history of the world, Hermeticism reflects a form of Neoplatonism popular in second-century AD Alexandria, Egypt. In texts such as the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Emerald Tablet of Hermes*, a broadly monistic cosmology is laid out in which the microcosms of the earth and the human body reflect the macrocosm, and everything is intimately connected by constantly circulating subtle forces. Hermetic monism thus became the basis for the various forms of ceremonial magic and alchemy practiced during the Medieval Period and beyond. Often during this period, Hermetic ideas were conflated with those of the Jewish Kabbalah, with which it shared many similarities and perhaps even the same roots. Together they form the basis for what has come to be called the western esoteric tradition.<sup>22</sup>

Until the Renaissance, it appears that Hermetic wisdom remained esoteric, perhaps still protected by secret societies that continued to impart the knowledge only after initiation. However, in 1462, the Florentine ruler, Cosimo de’ Medici, commissioned Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) to translate the Hermetic texts from Greek to Latin, making them widely available to the reading public. This sparked a renewed interest in magic and alchemy, if not in Hermetic philosophy for its own sake. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, a series of texts announced the existence of the “Order of the Rosy Cross” or Rosicrucianism, an initiatic secret society that combined Hermetic philosophy, alchemy, and Kabbalah with elements of Christian mysticism. It is still debated how real this group was (one of the texts’ authors, Johann Valentin Andreae, called it a joke [*ludibrium*]), but it generated immense interest in secret societies in general.<sup>23</sup> It is possible that Rosicrucianism provided the impetus for the later rise of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Freemasonry, soon to become the dominant form of initiatic secret society in the western world. As Timothy W. Hogan relates, many Hermetic and alchemical symbols were incorporated directly into the three degrees of Blue Lodge masonry and into some of the higher degrees (for example, the Knight of the Rose-Cross in the Scottish Rite).<sup>24</sup>

### **Albert Pike**

Product of the Enlightenment as Freemasonry was, however, there was a growing tendency among many 19<sup>th</sup>-century Masons to downplay the metaphysical aspects of Masonic symbols in favor of more generic moralistic meanings.<sup>25</sup> And yet,

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<sup>22</sup> For good introductions to western esotericism, see Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998) and Arthur Versluis, *Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> See Frances A. Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Ark Paperbacks, [1972] 1986).

<sup>24</sup> Timothy W. Hogan, “The Hermetic Influence on Freemasonry,” *Heredom* 17 (2009), pp. 121-36. See also Edmond Mazet, “Freemasonry and Esotericism,” in Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman (eds.), *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1995), pp. 248-276.

<sup>25</sup> Mazet (1995), p. 264.

there were always some Masons who were keen to recover and maintain the esoteric meanings of the craft's rites and symbols. In the United States, the most important such figure was Albert Pike (1809-1891), lawyer, journalist, Confederate general, and tireless researcher and writer on the Masonic mysteries. Pike joined Freemasonry as a member of Western Star Lodge 2 in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1851 and was active in the creation of the Grand Chapter of that state soon after. Between 1850 and 1853, Pike worked the degrees of the York Rite in Little Rock, and then, in Charleston, South Carolina on March 20, 1853, he received the 4<sup>th</sup> through the 32<sup>nd</sup> degrees of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction (S.J.). Rising quickly in this organization, Pike was elected Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in 1859. From then on, Pike devoted himself to the standardization and interpretation of the rituals of the Scottish Rite, even living his last years at the Scottish Rite House of the Temple in Washington DC, where he died in 1891. Pike's immense service to the craft was later recognized in 1944 when his body was enshrined in the new House of the Temple, which had been completed in 1915.<sup>26</sup>

Pike's *magnum opus* was the massive *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, originally published in 1872 and continually revised thereafter. In it, Pike subjected the symbols and rituals of the three degrees of the Blue Lodge and the thirty degrees of the Scottish Rite to intense analysis in order to discover their true philosophical and ethical meanings. An enthusiastic if uncritical student of comparative religion who disdained citations, Pike sought to trace the roots of Masonic ritual to the mystery religions of the Ancient world, especially Hermeticism and Kabbalah. In terms of the latter two traditions, Pike appropriated without acknowledgment long passages from the pen of Éliphas Lévi (1810-1875), a French magus and scholar whose many influential works are credited with sparking the "occult revival" that led to a fundamental re-appreciation of the western esoteric tradition. Indeed, in the United States, it was primarily through *Morals and Dogma* with its un-credited use of Lévi and other sources that many readers first encountered western esotericism. Thus, given the fact that copies were traditionally made available to those initiated into the Scottish Rite, it is possible that this is where John Fetzer himself first encountered the western esoteric tradition. Unfortunately, this can only be speculation because *Morals and Dogma* does not exist in the remains of Fetzer's library. However, since it was requested that the volume be returned to the Lodge upon the death of its owner, this might account for its absence. We do know, however, that Fetzer did own Mackey's two-volume *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (1927), a standard work that also treats of these subjects, albeit more summarily than Pike (Mackey, it should be pointed out, was Pike's publisher).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Walter Lee Brown, *A Life of Albert Pike* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 1997), pp. 417-24; Robert L. Uzzel, *Éliphas Lévi and the Kabbalah* (Lafayette, LA: Cornerstone Book Publishers, 2006), pp. 68-97.

<sup>27</sup> Arturo de Hoyos (ed.), *Albert Pike's Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, Second Edition (Washington, D.C.: Supreme Council, 33°, S.J., U.S.A.), pp. 21-30; Christopher McIntosh, *Eliphas Lévi and the French Occult Revival* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1972).



### *Theosophy and Esoteric Freemasonry*

Another possible avenue by which Fetzner might have become aware of the esoteric aspects of Freemasonry was through his reading of Theosophical texts. Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), who occasionally mentioned Freemasonry in her major works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, was familiar with Masonic literature since her great-grandfather had been a prominent Russian Freemason who had amassed an impressive Masonic library. However, according to John Alejo, while Blavatsky “had great respect for what she called ‘ancient’ or ‘Eastern’ Freemasonry,” she had “scorn for ‘modern, Western’ practices.” Nevertheless, perhaps due to the fact that so many early members of the Theosophical Society were already Masons, she specifically exempted Freemasonry from the ban on membership in other organizations devoted to “mystic study or occult training” when she established the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society in 1888.<sup>28</sup> After Blavatsky’s passing, however, the second generation of Theosophical leaders did seek closer ties with the craft, although with an irregular branch known as International Co-Masonry.

Co-Masonry, so named because it admits both men and women, was founded by Marie Deraismes and Georges Martin in France in 1883 as the *Grande Loge Symbolique Ecossaise de France “Le Droit Humain.”* Over the next decade it grew slowly, in part because of the resistance from regular “malecraft” Masonic bodies in France, which refused to countenance the “mixed” nature of Co-Masonry. In 1896, Marie Martin, wife of Georges Martin, brought her sister Francesca Arundale into the order. Arundale was a good friend of Madame Blavatsky and it was probably through her that Blavatsky’s successor to the leadership of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant (1847-1933), joined Co-Masonry in 1902. Besant perhaps saw in Co-Masonry a means to inject a bit of ritualism into the non-ritualistic Theosophical Society, although it is also clear that, unlike Blavatsky, Besant had a much more positive attitude towards Freemasonry in general, especially since her Masters told her that it was a legitimate revival of the ancient mysteries. Whatever the case may have been, with Besant’s example, Co-Masonry began to attract many Theosophists who mingled Theosophical concepts and terminology into Co-Masonic ritual. Indeed, with the exception of the United States, the English-speaking lodges of Co-Masonry eventually became almost wholly subsidiary to the Theosophical Society.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Freemasonry,” *Theosophia* ([theosophy.ph/encyclo/index.php?title=Freemasonry](http://theosophy.ph/encyclo/index.php?title=Freemasonry), accessed February 7, 2019).

<sup>29</sup> Andrew Prescott, “‘Builders of the Temple of the New Civilization’: Annie Besant and Freemasonry,” in Joannes Snoek and Alexandra Heidle (eds.), *Women’s Agency and Rituals in Mixed and Female Masonic Orders* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 359-91; Karen Kidd, *On Holy Ground: History of the Honorable Order of American Co-Masonry, The American Federation of Human Rights* (Larkspur, CO: The Masonic Publishing Company, Inc., 2011), pp. 8-19.

Among those Theosophists who were initiated into Co-Masonry, one of the most prominent was Charles W. Leadbeater (1854-1934), who for years functioned as Besant's right-hand man and staunch ally. Although not particularly interested in Masonry at first, once Leadbeater had communicated psychically with the Great White Brotherhood, he was informed of the importance of Freemasonry for the coming of the new World Teacher or Maitreya. Further, he was informed that the Comte St. Germain, Leadbeater's own Master, was in charge of all Freemasons worldwide. St. Germain subsequently told Leadbeater that Masonry was "a direct descendant of the Mysteries of Egypt" and enjoined him to revise the rituals according to their true esoteric meanings, which were available to him through the Akashic Records.<sup>30</sup> The results were two books published in 1926, *Glimpses of Masonic History* and *The Hidden Life of Masonry*. In the former book, Leadbeater defended Co-Masonry as the true restoration of Freemasonry by placing it within his particular understanding of Masonic history stretching back to Egypt (and even before, to Atlantis [Poseidonis]). In the latter book, on the other hand, Leadbeater interpreted the Blue Lodge degrees according to their putative Egyptian precedents, emphasizing the role subtle energies played in the efficacy of Masonic rituals. Both books would become highly influential in Theosophically influenced Co-Masonic lodges and beyond.<sup>31</sup>

A keen reader of Theosophical texts, it is possible that Fetzer was alerted to esoteric understandings of Freemasonry through the books of Blavatsky, Besant, and Leadbeater, although these books are not now present in the remains of his personal library. However, there was another prominent Theosophist whose books do highlight esoteric Freemasonry and are extant in Fetzer's library: Alice Bailey (1880-1949). Bailey was born into a wealthy English family in 1880, and as a young woman, she became a conservative Christian and spent time in India as a missionary with the YWCA. Bailey claimed that as child of 15, she had met a mysterious turbaned stranger who had told her she had a special mission in the world. She interpreted this at first to be a Christian mission, but upon joining the Theosophical Society in 1915, she saw a picture depicting Kuthumi, one of Blavatsky's mahatmas, and recognized him as the man she had met years before.<sup>32</sup> Bailey was contacted soon after by another Master, Djwhal Khul ("the Tibetan"), who enlisted her aid in channeling a series of books, the first of which was *Initiation Human and Solar*

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<sup>30</sup> Gregory Tillett, *The Elder Brother: A Biography of Charles Webster Leadbeater* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), pp. 168-69.

<sup>31</sup> C. W. Leadbeater, *Glimpses of Masonic History* (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1926); C. W. Leadbeater, *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry* (Adyar, Madras, India: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1926); Prescott (2008), pp. 367, 369; Kidd (2011), pp. 208-209.

<sup>32</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Unfinished Autobiography of Alice A. Bailey* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1951) (FPL). For Fetzer's underlined passages, see pp. 35-38, 51-55, 72, 89, 142, 155, 162-68, 171, 254-58. The Bailey books were available at Camp Chesterfield, so Fetzer may have first encountered them there (the author has in his possession a copy of Bailey's *Discipleship in the New Age* [1954 printing] with a "Psychic Observer Book Shop, Chesterfield, Indiana, USA." book plate). For Fetzer's underlined passages, see Bailey, *The Unfinished Autobiography* (1951), pp. 40-41, 72, 142, 237-40, 288, 299.

(1922).<sup>33</sup> The following year, Alice and her husband Foster Bailey were ejected from the Theosophical Society for her unauthorized channelings, after which they relocated to New York City where they founded the Lucis Trust and the Arcane School.<sup>34</sup>

Freemasonry is a subject that runs through much of Alice Bailey's writings. In *Initiation Human and Solar*, for example, Bailey makes the claim that the heads of modern Freemasonry are all Masters or initiates of Masters, and that Masonic Blue Lodges mirror the initiation rituals of the Great White Lodge of the ascended Masters.<sup>35</sup> Given her positive assessment of Freemasonry potential contributions to the coming "New Age," it is not surprising that Bailey herself joined the Co-Masonic Verulam Lodge No. 525 when she and her husband moved to New York. As in the rest of the English-speaking world, Co-Masonry had proven very popular among Theosophists in the United States, and although the American order retained its autonomy from The Theosophical Society longer than elsewhere, there were certain lodges, for example in Chicago, where Theosophists predominated early on. Such was not the case with Verulam Lodge, where Theosophists and non-Theosophists waged a bitter conflict over the place of Theosophy in the order. Things came to a head in 1930 when Bailey led an unsuccessful schism that was not supported by the Grand Commander of the American Federation of Co-Masonry, Louis Goaziou, after which she withdrew from Co-Masonry altogether. Ironically, by the following decade, American Co-Masonry would be completely in the hands of Theosophists, but by this time Bailey was busy managing her rapidly expanding Arcane School.<sup>36</sup>

Despite her acrimonious departure from Co-Masonry, Alice Bailey still held Freemasonry in high regard and hoped that the craft—rightly interpreted—would aid in the coming global spiritual transformation. For example, in the late book, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, Bailey wrote,

The *Masonic Movement* ... is the home of the Mysteries and the seat of initiation. It holds in its symbolism the ritual of Deity, and the way of salvation is pictorially preserved in its work. The methods of Deity are demonstrated in its Temples, and under the All-seeing Eye the work can go forward. It is a far more occult organisation than can be realised, and is intended to be the training school for the coming advanced occultists. In its ceremonials lies hid the wielding of the forces connected with the growth and life of the kingdoms of nature and the unfoldment of the divine aspects in man. In the comprehension of its symbolism will come the power to cooperate with the divine plan.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., [1922] 1959). (FPL)

<sup>34</sup> For more on Bailey and the Arcane School, see Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America* (1973), 103-106; Melton *et al.*, *New Age Almanac* (1991), pp. 9-12.

<sup>35</sup> Bailey (1959), pp. 35, 79, 149; see also Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis Trust, 1957), p. 574.

<sup>36</sup> Kidd (2011), pp. 105-107, 221-27, 247-56.

<sup>37</sup> Bailey (1957), p. 511.

John Fetzer likely was not aware of Co-Masonry and its history, but he was deeply interested in the writings of Alice Bailey. Annotated copies of *The Unfinished Autobiography of Alice A. Bailey* and *Initiation Human and Solar* can be found in the remains of Fetzer's personal library, and there is evidence that he also read *The Externalisation of the Hierarchy* and other Bailey works.<sup>38</sup> Thus, when it comes to Theosophically inflected esoteric Freemasonry, while it is possible that Fetzer was exposed to it in the works of the founders of the Theosophical Society such as Blavatsky, Besant, and Leadbeater, we can be sure that he was in the works of Alice Bailey.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Manly P. Hall***

One last place that John Fetzer likely met with esoteric interpretations of Freemasonry is in the works of the independent esotericist and amateur scholar, Manly Palmer Hall (1901-1990).<sup>40</sup> Born in Canada and spending much of his childhood moving about the United States with his grandmother, Hall went to live with his estranged mother in Southern California in 1919. There, through the offices of the phrenologist, Sydney J. Brownson, Hall became active in the region's growing metaphysical subculture, eventually becoming the pastor of the liberal Church of the People in downtown Los Angeles. Hall also became involved in Theosophical and Rosicrucian circles, spending much time at Mt. Ecclesia, Max Heindel's Rosicrucian Fellowship commune in nearby Oceanside. During this time, too, Hall started his lifelong habit of collecting rare volumes of esoteric lore, eventually amassing one of the finest esoteric libraries on the West Coast.

In 1923, aided by wealthy patrons, Hall traveled around the world gathering information that he hoped would supplement his voracious book learning and allow him to produce an encyclopedic account of the world's secret wisdom traditions. The result was a massive volume entitled, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy Being an Interpretation of the Secret Teachings Concealed Within the Rituals, Allegories, and Mysteries of all Ages*. The goal of the book was to prove "the proposition that concealed within the emblematic figures, allegories, and rituals of the ancients is a secret doctrine concerning the inner mysteries of life, which doctrine has been preserved in toto among a small band of initiated minds."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Wilson (2018), pp. 294, note 29.

<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, Foster Bailey (1888-1977), who in 1913 became a member of a regular Masonic Lodge (Charles W. Moore Lodge A.F. & A.M., Fitchburg, Massachusetts) and rose to the 33°, wrote a book on esoteric Freemasonry: *The Spirit of Masonry* (New York: Lucis Publishing Co., 1957). It is not known whether John Fetzer was aware of this book.

<sup>40</sup> Information in this paragraph is from Louis Sahagun, *Master of the Mysteries: The Life of Manly Palmer Hall* (Port Townsend, WA: Process Media, 2016). A brief overview of Hall's career and influence can be found in Mitch Horowitz, *Occult America* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), pp. 147-63.

<sup>41</sup> Manly P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy Being an Interpretation of the Secret Teachings*

Published in 1928, *The Secret Teachings* remains an esoteric classic, far outselling any of Hall's other dozens of books and remaining in print to this day. The success of *The Secret Teachings of All Ages* and his subsequent writings brought Hall a great following, especially among the wealthy of Los Angeles, who funded the creation of his Philosophical Research Society (PRS), an esoteric institute that would house Hall's library and serve as his headquarters for the rest of his life.

From the beginning of his career as an esoteric philosopher, Manly P. Hall was fascinated by Freemasonry, although, intriguingly, it was only on November 22, 1954 that he was initiated into the craft in San Francisco as a member of Jewel Lodge No. 374. A year later, Hall entered into the Scottish Rite, again in San Francisco, eventually rising to the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree in 1973. According to Louis Sahagun, one of the reasons Hall delayed becoming a Mason was because he took the vow of secrecy seriously, and once he joined a lodge, he never again wrote publically about Freemasonry. Before this, however, Hall, who claimed to be the reincarnation of Albert Pike, wrote about Masonry frequently, believing it to be the clearest example of a modern secret society with roots stretching back to the Ancient mystery religions.<sup>42</sup> *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, for example, is framed to some degree as a search for the putative esoteric origins of Masonic rituals, and Masonry runs like a golden thread throughout the massive volume.

Other books by Hall also focused specifically on this theme of the esoteric roots of Freemasonry: *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry* (1923), *Occult Masonry* (1929), *Freemasonry of the Ancient Egyptians* (1937), and *Masonic Orders of Fraternity* (1950).<sup>43</sup> For the most part, Hall was a compiler and synthesizer of other people's work, and much of his writing on the esoteric roots of Freemasonry relied on earlier writers such as Éliphas Lévi, Albert Pike, and a variety of other sources including Theosophical literature. However, Hall did emphasize one theme to a degree that others did not: the legendary role of Freemasons in the founding of the United States and the promotion of its sacred mission to unify the world. Thus, in *America's Assignment with Destiny* (1951), Hall argued that among the Founding Fathers, it was the Freemasons, acting on the "Great Plan" preserved by generations of secret societies stretching back to Atlantis, who were largely responsible for establishing the democratic tradition in America, a land, Hall claimed further, that had long been

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*Concealed Within the Rituals, Allegories, and Mysteries of all Ages* (San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Company, Inc., 1928), p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Sahagun (2016), pp. 177, 239, 257; Hall's funeral was conducted with full Masonic rites (pp. 237-38)

<sup>43</sup> *The Lost Keys of Freemasonry* (New York: Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., 1923), *Occult Masonry* (Los Angeles: Hall Pub. Co., 1929), *Freemasonry of the Ancient Egyptians* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1937), *Masonic Orders of Fraternity* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1950)

prophesied to be the birthplace of the coming “World Commonwealth and Universal Reformation.”<sup>44</sup>

It is unclear when John Fetzer first read Hall. We do know that sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s, Judy Skutch Whitson gave Fetzer one of the original first editions of Manly P. Hall’s *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, a gift he much appreciated. However, it seems most unlikely that Fetzer had not encountered Hall’s *magnum opus* years earlier, not to mention at least some of Hall’s other writings, although there is no evidence of this.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, as mentioned above, the role of Masonry in the sacred destiny of America was a story that fascinated Fetzer, and although less esoteric versions of this story were commonplace in Masonic literature since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Fetzer might have had it confirmed in Hall’s retelling of it in books like *America’s Assignment with Destiny*. Unfortunately, though, none of Hall’s books are now extant in Fetzer’s personal library, so, in the end, the most we can conclude is that there is some evidence that Fetzer read Hall, but what and when remains elusive.

### **Conclusion**

That John Fetzer valued Freemasonry as an important part of his life, his 57-year involvement in the craft makes plain. Masonic ritual provided much desired fellowship, and the moral values taught by Freemasonry undoubtedly played an important role in Fetzer’s personal and professional development. Moreover, as the preceding paragraphs demonstrate, it is also highly likely that Fetzer was aware of Freemasonry as an esoteric tradition and it is reasonable to assume that these deeper esoteric interpretations of Freemasonry played a role in the creation of his spiritual worldview. Unfortunately, beyond this we cannot go. Given the fact that, like Manly P. Hall, Fetzer took Masonic secrecy seriously and spoke and wrote very little about his Masonic life, this is the most we can say based on the available evidence. Thus the question with which we began this section must remain only tentatively answered. Sadly for the historian, not in vain does the ancient Masonic motto command, “Vide, Aude, Tace”—“See, Dare, and be Silent”!

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<sup>44</sup> *America’s Assignment with Destiny* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1951). An earlier book, *The Secret Destiny of America* (Los Angeles: Philosophical Research Society, 1944) told essentially the same story about the Great Plan, but without as much emphasis on Freemasonry.

<sup>45</sup> Whitson Oral History (March 30, 2011), pp. 15-16. Tom Beaver confirms the presence of the book in Fetzer’s personal library (personal communication, April 14, 2019). Unfortunately, the book is not preserved at the Fetzer Institute Archives. There exists in the Fetzer archives copies of an announcement and personal invitation sent to Fetzer for a lecture by Manly P. Hall in Sedona, Arizona on May 9, 1987 [FI 7 [Foundation Correspondence 1987-1988]: “The Sedona Center and Beacon Light Center, Inc. Welcomes Manly Palmer Hall and Marie Bauer Hall” [May 9-12, 1987] [R02.13115]]. It is not known whether Fetzer actually attended the lecture.

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